

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-02 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-02 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-15 IO-14 COME-00 EB-08 LAB-04 SIL-01 TRSE-00

/097 W

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R 121203Z SEP 77

FM AMCONSUL BELFAST

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1769

INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

UNCLAS BELFAST 283

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, UK, EI

SUBJECT: FRUSTRATION WITHIN SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOUR PARTY

REF: BELFAST 258

1. SUMMARY: GROWING FRUSTRATION WITHIN THE SDLP WAS EVIDENCED BY THE SLASHING ATTACK ON PARTY LEADERSHIP AND POLICY FROM EBULLIENT PADDY DEVLIN, WHICH SO FAR APPEARS MERELY TO HAVE HARDENED THE SENIOR LEADERS' RESOLVE TO CONTINUE THEIR COURSE. IT IS LIKELY THAT STRAIN IN THE PARTY WILL CONTINUE. END SUMMARY.

2. IN AN AGGRESSIVE STATEMENT AUGUST 25, DEVLIN ACCUSED HIS COLLEAGUES OF ABANDONING THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC GOALS ON WHICH THE PARTY WAS FOUNDED IN 1970, AND OF EMBRACING THE GREEN FLAG OF THE "IRISH DEMENSION" -- I.E., PUTTING THE NORTHERN IRISH PROBLEM WITHIN AN ALL-IRELAND CONTEXT. HE SAID HE AGREED WITH THE PARTY EXECUTIVE'S AUGUST 13 STATEMENT (REF), BUT THAT IT HAD NOT GONE FAR ENOUGH. ACCORDING TO HIS ANALYSIS, THE UNIONISTS WERE IN A VULNERABLE POSITION BECAUSE OF: (A) THE LOSS OF MODERATE UNIONIST VOTES IN THE UNCLASSIFIED

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MAY ELECTIONS, AND (B) THE BREAKING OF PAISLEY'S MAY STRIKE CALL BY COURAGEOUS WORKERS WHO REFUSED TO HONOR PICKET LINES. UNIONIST RIGIDITY PUT INTO QUESTION SDLP PERSUANCE OF POWER SHARING, BUT UNIONIST WEAKNESS COULD BE EXPLOITED BY EMPHASIZING SOCIAL-ECONOMIC ISSUES. BY NOT DOING SO, THE SDLP WOULD GIVE UP ITS CHALLENGE OF THE UNIONISTS FOR POWER IN NI, AND GIVE UP ITS APPEAL TO

MODERATE UNIONISTS. WITHOUT NAMING HIM, DEVLIN GAVE A DIG AT SDLP DEPUTY LEADER JOHN HUME, WHO HE ACCUSED OF TRYING TO EXPLOIT PRESIDENT CARTER'S FORTHCOMING STATEMENT TO STRENGTHEN HIS PERSONAL POWER POSITION.

3. DEVLIN SAID HIS "DEEPENING DISENCHANTMENT" WITH THE PARTY'S DRIFT COMPELLED HIM TO REEXAMINE HIS RELATINSHIP TO THE PARTY. HE HAD DECIDED TO DROP HIS POSITION AS CHAIRMAN OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION REPRESENTATIVES BUT WOULD CONTINUE AS AN ACTIVE SDLP MEMBER.

4. DEVLIN RECEIVED LITTLE PUBLIC SUPPORT FROM WITHIN THE PARTY, ALTHOUGH APPARENTLY THERE IS SIGNIFICANT SYMPATHY FOR HIM BEHIND THE SCENES. THE CONSTITUENCY REPRESENTATIVES UNANIMOUSLY ACCEPTED HIS RESIGNATION, REMOVED HIM FROM THE EXECUTIVE, SUSPENDED HIM AS A PARTY SPOKESMAN, AND PUT HIS MEMBERSHIP ON NOTICE. THE EXECUTIVE ENDORSED THESE MEASURES UNANIMOUSLY. DEVLIN HIMSELF REMAINS UNREPENTANT AND CONTINUES TO CRITICIZE. PARTY LEADERS OBVIOUSLY ARE RELUCTANT TO EXPELL HIM, BUT THAT POSSIBILITY REMAINS OPEN. IN SIMPLISTIC TERMS, THE ISSUE AS DEVLIN -- AND OTHERS -- SEES IT IS WHETHER THE SDLP WILL CONCENTRATE ON THE EASY, EMOTIONAL APPEAL TO THE GREEN VS. ORANGE, OR ON THE REAL BREAD-AND-BUTTER ISSUES OF JOBS, HOUSING AND SOCIAL SERVICES.

5. COMMENT: HE HOPED TO FORCE SDLP LEADERS TO REEXAMINE  
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THEIR POSITION, BUT INITIALLY AT LEAST HIS TACTICS MAY SERVE TO HARDEN THEM. THE PARTY HAS YET TO APPROVE A POLICY DOCUMENT NOW PENDING A MONTH, THAT IS SUPPOSED TO STRENGTHEN ITS COMMITMENT TO THE IRISH DIMENSION, BUT PARTY LEADERSHIP HAS TAKEN NO STEP TO DENY A NEW EMPHASIS. INDEED, JOHN HUME REFERRED POSITIVELY TO THE IRISH DIMENSION IN HIS COMMENT ON PRESIDENT CARTER'S STATEMENT (BELFAST 275), AND SDLP LEADER GERRY FITT STRESSED IT MORE RECENTLY.

6. THE SDLP IS IN AN UNCOMFORTABLE POSITION. THEY PERCEIVED THE OFFICIAL UNIONISTS AS UNDER HMG'S WING AND WITH NO INCENTIVE TO COOPERATE WITH THEM. THEY ARE NOT ABLE TO PRESENT THEIR CONSTITUENCY WITH VISIBLE ACHIEVEMENTS. INTERNAL STRAINS ARE INEVITABLE AND THE PARTY IS EVEN UNDER AN ADDITIONAL NEW PSYCHOLOGICAL PRESSURE. DURING THE CURRENT INTERNAL ARGUMENT, HARDLINERS FROM THE WESTERN PART OF THE PROVINCE SURFACED A PLAN TO RELAUNCH A NATIONALIST PARTY DEDICATED TO FORCING THE BRITISH OUT BY PEACEFUL MEANS. THIS THREAT FROM THE RIGHT MAY FURTHER ENCOURAGE EMPHASIS ON THE GREEN, AND LEAD TO FURTHER UNIONIST REACTION AGAINST THE SDLP AS UNFIT FOR

PARTNERSHIP.

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## Message Attributes

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